

Corpus Christi Procession

Even before the cross-bearer appeared round the distant corner Nicholas could hear the choir, as it emerged from the church, chanting the great processional hymn, 'Lauda Sion.' Behind the cross, their embroidered banners held high, followed the Trade Guilds of the town, the Bakers, the Grocers, the Tanners, and all the rest, with the various crafts of the Cloth Trade, weavers, fullers, dyers, shearers, massed together at the end.

The gaily-colored banners were still passing along the street, moving from brilliant light into deep shade and out again, when the choir and the clergy with the golden canopy turned the corner and came into view. The hymn changed and the cantors sang the opening notes of the 'Pange Lingua.' The first soaring line of the familiar chant awoke echoes everywhere among the crowd. Timidly at first a few people joined in; then, gaining courage from each other, more and more in a swelling unison until the very walls of the town seemed to be singing. Then, gradually nearer, a new sound approached – the tinkling of the bells. As though a sickle had swept along the street the crowd dropped to its knees. The tide of voices ebbed as heads were bowed, while the canopy beneath which the priest carried the Blessed Sacrament passed slowly by.

Cynthia Harnett, *The Wool Pack*